

Online Component Shopping

track down those elusive parts

By Martin Cooke

Two years ago we published an article lamenting the passing of many of the smaller suppliers of components and noting the rise of Internet shopping. Some companies have since folded and others have sprung up to serve the needs of the intrepid electronics enthusiast. We thought it timely to pen an update on the current situation.



RS components... Not just for trade customers.

How often have you been put off building a project when you discover that it specifies really exotic components that no supplier has heard of?

It used to be that finding data sheets were a problem not only for the hobbyist but also sometimes for professional engineers. With the

advent of the Internet most component manufacturers make this information freely available on their web-sites and there are now many independent sites dedicated to supplying technical data sheets, all the information you need is just a download away.

Tracking down and ordering components using the Internet should also be much speedier and more convenient than using traditional methods. It seems however that many people are cautious about giving out their credit/debit card details on-line for fear that they will fall into unscrupulous hands. Figures for the year 2000 suggest that only a tiny proportion of credit card fraud occurred over the net. Remarkably, your card details are far more likely to be hi-jacked in the high street than intercepted on the internet.

If anything does go wrong with an Internet transaction you are protected by UK criminal and civil laws if the company is UK based.

Methods of payment

The most popular method of payment for purchases over the Internet

is with a credit/debit card. Credit card companies stipulate a minimum age of 18 years whereas debit cards can be issued at 16 if you fulfil the banks criteria (no dosh, no card). Recently some banks have introduced credit cards to encourage customers to make more use of the net by offering cashback of 2% on net transactions from its Internet shopping partners. Another innovation to increase consumer confidence is the one-use credit card number — for each purchase you use a credit card number that is only valid for one transaction.

E-wallets help to make shopping more convenient by keeping your credit card information in a secure area of your browser and transferring the necessary card information (encrypted) at the moment of purchase.

Most overseas web traders accept the major credit cards and in this case each transaction is shown on your monthly statement along with its conversion into sterling.

Overseas customers living outside the EU zone and ordering goods from companies inside the EU will of course not expect to pay VAT but must pay an import duty (this varies from country to country) and additional postage charges will be incurred.

Companies online

An increasing number of component retailers are turning to the Internet.

Among them is **Maplin Electronics**. Maplin has been in existence now for over 25 years has almost 60 shops throughout the UK and Ireland and an on-line catalogue (www.maplin.co.uk). It stocks around 20,000 products and offers on-line product availability check and same day despatch. Orders valued at less than £30 incur a small handling charge — otherwise postage is free.

RS Components have always been suppliers to the trade but have been catering for the needs of individuals through its **Electromail** branch since 1985. Their website is at www.rswww.com.

Leeds-based **Farnell** carries an



Maplin... The most prolific high street component retailer.

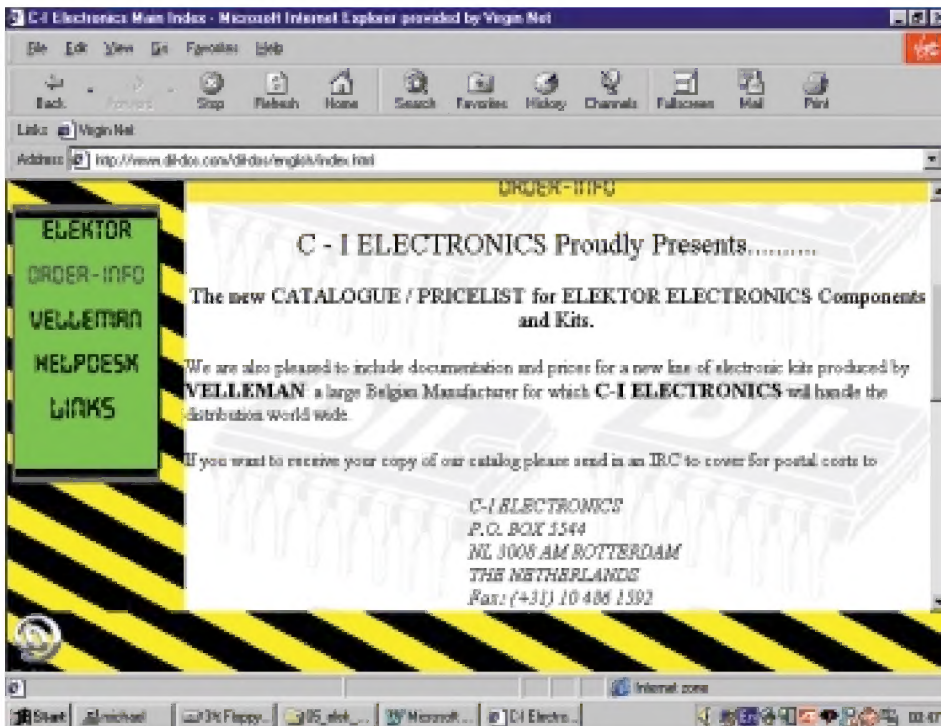
enormous stock of products and has an impressive web site with on-line shopping and a 24hr manned order hot line. It supplies to the trade and also to individuals. There is a minimum order value of £10.00 on credit

card orders and delivery is free. They can be found at www.farnell.com.

If you are specifically searching for parts for Elektor Electronics projects then a good source is **C-I Electronics** based in Rotterdam,



Farnell... An impressive website and excellent service.



C-I Electronics... Have been specialising in supplying Elektor Electronic kits and parts for over ten years.

The Netherlands. This company specialises in supplying complete kits and individual items. Although C-I Electronics does not trade on the net, its website lists kits of parts for Elektor Electronics projects and Velleman kits. Prices are quoted in Euros so with the current favourable exchange rate to UK sterling the prices represent good value. This company carries a vast stock of components and accepts the main credit cards. Orders are made on a downloaded order form and sent conventionally via snail-mail. Enquiries should be made by fax or e-mail. More information is available from their website at www.dil-dos.com.

Viewcom Electronics are another firm which specialises in the supply of kits, PCB's and parts for Elektor Electronics projects along with a broad spectrum of components supplying to both the trade and individuals. This company does not presently have a website but can be reached via email at sales@viewcom.force9.co.uk. All major credit/debit cards are accepted.

Sky Electronics (formerly Cricklewood Electronics Ltd) offer a wide range of products and supplies to the trade and individuals. On-line ordering is not possible at the time of writing. They can be reached at www.sky-electronics.co.uk

Greenweld Limited supply good value components and kits along with surplus stock items. On-line ordering and catalogue browsing can be found at www.greenweld.co.uk.

Electrovalue Ltd stocks an extensive range of general components and in particular wound products, pot cores, ferrites etc they stock EPCOS (formally Siemens) products and supply to both the trade and individuals, a minimum order charge of £5.00 is only applicable if you pay by credit card. On-line ordering is currently not possible. Find them at www.electrovalue.co.uk.

Distel are a company specialising in the supply of surplus stock. It has loads of interesting products on its web site at www.distel.co.uk so if your thinking of building a robot to bash the brains out of hypno-disc in next season's Robot Wars then this may be a good place to start.

Eurodis is a large European component distributor and has a UK presence through **HB Electronics** in Bolton. They are geared to supplying to the trade and have a minimum

order value of £150.00. Their website is at www.eurodis.com.

Spoerle is also a large European distributor and is now part of the Arrow group. Branches are found in the UK and most European countries. They carry a wide range of products and do not have any minimum order value restriction. The company does not sell on-line at present but you can reach their website at www.spoerle.com.

Conrad Electronics is based in Germany and has a multilingual web site with prices in Euros, it offers full catalogue and on-line ordering and a handy Euro to sterling converter on its website at www.conrad-electronic.com.

Happy hunting

On balance, the Internet is a good facility for the electronics enthusiast but it pays to be cautious if you are thinking of ordering from a new supplier. Remember the golden rules:

- Always look for the company address, country and telephone information on the website.
- Ensure that a secure server is used before you give details of your credit card. (look for the key icon in Netscape Navigator or the little yellow padlock when using Microsoft Explorer).
- Check the costs of postage and packing (p&p), and any minimum order charge.
- Search newsgroups (www.deja.com/usenet) or sites such as ePinions (www.epinions.com) to check for any bad user feedback connected with the company.
- Check your monthly statement.

If you are still unsure it is worth giving the company a ring. A five-minute call can reveal far more about an organisation than any elegantly crafted web page.

Not least, PCB's, pre-programmed controllers and software for Elektor Electronics projects, along with technical books and much more can be ordered on-line from our own website at www.elektor-electronics.co.uk.

(000146-1)